THE LIBRARY AND ACCREDITATION OF INDIAN UNIVERSITIES: CASE OF THE SNDT UNIVERSITY, MUMBAI

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ABSTRACT:

Accreditation of universities in Indian is of utmost importance. Without it, most Indian Universities would definitely be substandard, and at best be glorified secondary schools. This paper examines the role of the library in accreditation in Indian universities with particular focus on University of India, SNDT Women's University Library. It highlights the legal backing of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in regulating institutions of higher learning in India. The paper founds that University Libraries face a lot of challenges during accreditation exercises. These include lateness in getting information about upcoming accreditation exercises, inadequacy of funds for collection development and delays in accessing approved funds. To solve these problems, the paper recommends that funds meant for the University Library should be released on time; the NAAC should monitor compliance with the policy which stipulates that universities in India should set aside 10% of their budget for library development; sanctions should be imposed on universities that divert library allocation and finally accreditation of university libraries should go beyond simply assessing the quantity and quality of collections. In addition, the NAAC should also assess the adequacy and competence of librarians, the sitting capacity of libraries in relation to the user population and the extent to which libraries collaborate with faculties in the general university education.

Keywords: Accreditation, University Library, SNDT Women's University, NAAC.

INTRODUCTION:

Universities are institutions of higher learning established for teaching, research and learning. The aim of universities in any country is to provide the right environment in which qualified and competent manpower needed to occupy different developmental and policy making positions of the society would be produced (Garba, 2010). To ensure that universities meet this enormous

responsibility thrust upon them, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) took place where the task of performance evaluation, assessment and accreditation of universities and colleges in the country is to be done. This is called accreditation. Accreditation standards are set by a peer reviewed criteria established for measuring institutional education quality. During an accreditation exercise, the following areas are usually assessed: curricular aspects, teaching learning and evaluation, research, innovations and extension, infrastructure and learning resources, student support and progression and governance, leadership and management (NAAC, 2018). In every accreditation exercise, the university library which is the general "treasury of knowledge" that provides both the information resources and enabling environment necessary for the pursuit of academic programmes plays a very crucial role. Accreditation of universities provides a veritable opportunity for university libraries to improve their collection and services. It however, also creates anxiety among librarians and faculties in the university concerned. As a result of the pride of place accreditation and library occupy in the development and academic life of every nation, both concepts have generated a lot of literature most of which helped to enrich our paper. This paper is entirely based on a SNDT Women's University which has a different structure from that of state universities Maharashtra.

ROLE OF LIBRARY IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

The role of the library can be defined within the framework of the university's mission and a library development programme can be undertaken accordingly. In the words of Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, "Libraries are not more store houses, they are rich springs from which knowledge flows out to irrigate field of education and culture." The fundamental role of the university library is educational. It should not be operated as a mere storehouse of books attached to a reading room, but as a dynamic instrument of education. It is emphasized in different reports brought out by various library and educational commissions in India and abroad. A university library is established with the intention of aiding in successful accomplishment of the objectives such as teaching, research, publication programmes, etc. In modern education system, the university library has important responsibilities. The report by University Grant Committee (United Kingdom) in 1921 is stressed on the role of a library in university system. Thus, the character and efficiency of a university may be extended by its treatment of its central organ library. We regard the fullest provision for library maintenance as the primary need in the equipment of a university.

In India the University Education Commission (1948-49) headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan describes that teacher must have the necessary tools for teaching purpose in the shape of libraries and laboratories as also the right type of students. According to him, "The library is the heart of the University's work; directly so as regards its research work and indirectly as regards its educational work, which derives its life from research work. Scientific research needs a library as well as its

laboratories, while for humanistic research. The library is both library and laboratory in one." The training in higher branches of learning and research is mainly a question of learning how to use the tools, and if the library tools are not there, how can the students learn to use them.

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan headed the report of the Library Committee of University Grants Commission in 1957 that dealt with in detail the role of the university library in academic development especially in the field of higher education. The above observations can be summarizing in the words as:

I.   The library is the heart of education;

II.   Methods & fashion in education change from generation to generation, but each generation uses the library as a means of realizing its items; hence the library remains the great conservator of learning;

III. A quality education is impossible without a quality library;

IV.   A library is vital organ for proper exploitation of our intellectual resources;

V.   A library is essential for maintenance of free access to ideas, and to the functioning of the untrammelled mind.

NAAC ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION:

NAAC is an autonomous instituting established by the UGC in 1994. The prime agenda of NAAC is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning with all objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education (Aithal, Shailashree, and Kumar, 2016). NAAC is a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education comprising of over 120 different national agencies engaged in Assessment, Accreditation and Academic Audit.

Aside the powers discussed above, the Commission is also vested with the following functions;

1. Preparation of the self-study Report by the Institution/ department based the parameters defined by NAAC.

2. Validation of self-study Report by a team of peers through an on-site visit, presentation of a detailed quality report to the institution.

3. The final decision an assessment and accreditations by the Executive Committee of NAAC.

4. The accreditation process involves a preparation of a self-study report by the college and validation of this report by three to four members peer team consisting of vice-chancellors. Principals, Deans and Senior teachers, state. Based on the detailed criterion-wise evaluation considering several parameters and the key aspects the percentage institutional scores will be arrived at institutions scoring above 55% will only be accredited.

In addition, an inn-depth analysis of the colleges; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and areas of concerns will be presented to the college and discuss with the College authorities. The

accreditation status is valid for a period of five years.

The overriding objective is to ensure that higher education institutions in India can maintain standards which would give their graduates the ability to compete internationally.

ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN ACCREDITATION:

The library plays a very critical role not only in the academic life of members of educational institutions, but also in their moral development. Zhang (2004) points out that the library has always been the intellectual heart of the university, as it has the responsibility of acquiring and providing access to recorded documents that represent the knowledge and wisdom of centuries of civilisation. This important role has led to the library being variously described as the academic engine house, centre of university education and the university intellectual powerhouse. It is because of the perceived centrality of the library in the academic endeavour given that it has the responsibility of collecting, organising and retrieving information and information resources and making all these accessible to users. To this end, the academic success of any university depends so much on the state and health of its library as no university can boast of academic excellence if it does not have a good and functional library to back up its teaching, learning and research functions. It can safely be said that the extent of the success of the university in achieving its objectives can be measured by the extent to which its library resources and services are able to meet the needs of the academic community. It can also be argued that the understanding of the role of the library in academics was central to the decision in many countries to accord academic status to librarians in academic institutions. From the foregoing, one can easily understand the reason why the library is evaluated during accreditation. Simmons (1991) observes that it is in the interest of academic institutions to show their effectiveness in graduating students who are information literate. They further state that ensuring that the general education programmes are supported with library-based resources must be seen as a joint responsibility between librarians and faculties. In effect any accrediting body that does not include a strong component on the value of library support for all programmes will certainly be deficient.

SNDT WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY LIBRARY AND IT'S ROLE IN THE UNIVERSITY'S ACCREDITATION:

The SNDT Women's University is the first Women's university in India as well as in South-East Asia. The University was founded by Maharshi Dr. Dhondo Keshav Karve. It came into existence in October 1916 as the very first women's university in India. It runs a multi-campus system. The main campus is situated at Churchgate, Mumbai city in Maharashtra State, India. Another two campuses of the university are situated in the Juhu, and Pune. The Juhu campus of the university houses the professional courses, and such includes a teaching engineering, management and law etc.

The SNDT Women's University Library was established in 1955 and today it has grown to a multi-campus Library Systems. Its vision is to facilitate seamless access to quality knowledge and information resources in all formats. To execute this vision, the library tries to create congenial atmosphere that will allow interface of library resources for integrative scholarship which is devoted to empowerment of women by providing resources and services with ICTs essential to teaching, learning. It serves the researchers to generate new frontiers of knowledge and dissemination of information through its various information and documentation activities. To realize this mission, the library is committed to create hospitable physical and virtual environment for study teaching and research.

The SNDT Women's University library has collections of over 3,98,000 books and non-book materials in addition to online public access catalogue (OPAC), Institutional Repository, ProQuest database, Knimbus remote access digital library, APA PsycArticles database, IndiaStat statistical database, eShodhsindh e-resources, URKUND etc. Library holdings can, however, never be enough. It is not a secret that many educational institutions especially those in the developing countries are experiencing inadequate funding. This situation affects the internal running of the various arms of universities including the library. Collection development especially in journal subscription is seriously affected demanding that libraries devise some strategies to ensure that accreditation exercises are successful from the angle of the library. The university library system is seriously committed to this and this has always paid off. All the thirty-nine departments, thirteen institutes and conducted colleges are all accredited. The strategy is that the library has in place a system wherein librarians are assigned to various faculties as Deputy librarian and University Librarian. These assignments are made based on the subject area specialization of the librarians.

Compilation of Library Holdings: The Library is expected to submit to the accreditation team compiled list of the library holdings in the different disciplines offered in the university giving the bibliographic details of each. The aim is for the accreditation team to have a clearer view of the stock, with attention paid to relevance, quantity and currency. It is the responsibility of the Liaison to see to it that the library holding of his/her faculty is compiled and bound for submission to the accreditation team. The Liaison also ensures that the list is continually updated with each new addition to the collection.

Online Search for Useful Websites and Articles: Since it is not possible for any library to acquire all the materials it needs, most libraries in India depend on online resources as a complement to their collection. It is also not possible for a library to subscribe to every fee based educational database and so in many cases free ones are used. It is the responsibility of the Librarians to search out open access sites and link them to the university library website. In some cases, relevant open access

articles are downloaded for use by faculties. These are merged with the library collection. Relevant websites in relevant subject disciplines are bookmarked, organised and printed. Titles of open access journals in relevant subject disciplines are also downloaded and compiled. These are organised, printed and bound. During accreditation visits to the library, websites are visited to prove to the team that the library has internet connectivity and that both students and staff have access to these sites. The library in partnership with the University Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centre ensures that internet connection stays on. The library also makes provision for an alternative source of electricity in the case of power outage.

Exhibition/Display: As a method of ensuring that the library puts its best foot out, an exhibition of most of the core materials is mounted in an exhibition space. The accreditation team is taken to this area where they inspect the materials on display. The library has found this method very useful over the years as it allows the accreditation team to do on the spot check of some titles which the library claims to possess. Leaving them on the shelf may not provide enough visibility.

Organisation of Faculty and Departmental Libraries: University Library is run by Librarians from the Churchgate campus who report to the Vice-Chancellor. These Librarians ensure that Faculty libraries are prepared for accreditation exercises. The staffing situation makes this rather difficult. To ensure that accreditation is successful University Librarian and Deputy Librarian together with his/her assistants ensures that all the libraries are well organised. They help in whatever form the faculty requests.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Accreditation must be approached with the seriousness and attention it deserves. Planning for accreditation should begin quite early to avoid anxiety and confusion which the exercise tends to generate. Also, the university administration and government should be more committed to funding the library and to ensuring that constant review of stocks and facilities are carried out for quality assurance. It is instructive that the NAAC Criteria stipulates that 10% of universities' budget should be set aside for library development. This should be adhered to as this is not the case in many universities. The NAAC must put in place a system that monitors compliance and sanctions erring universities. By so doing, acquisitions by libraries would be on a continuing basis and not ad-hoc as is the reality on the ground presently.

Finally, the basis for accreditation of libraries should go beyond the superficial level of assessing quantity and stock to include assessment of the capacity of the library building viz a viz the population of users, adequacy and competence of librarians in library service delivery and assessment of the extent of collaboration between the library and faculties in the general university education.

CONCLUSION:

Accreditation is a necessary exercise for assessment of universities and their academic programmes to ensure that quality is maintained. This is especially important in India at this time when there seems to be questions raised about the quality of graduates turned out by universities in India. The Knowledge Resource Centre as the arm of the university charged with the responsibility to ensure that information resources needed to support academic programmes are acquired, organised and disseminated is also evaluated during accreditation as it rightly should. The library plays a very important role in seeing that the university succeeds in the accreditation process. However, accreditation was done in 2015 after a reorganisation of the library. This clearly emphasizes the necessity of the library in accreditation by standing up to the challenges by seeing to it that it does all it could to meet expectations.

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